9/18/66

What ought a minister say to his congregation on his fi rst Sunday in the pulpit? This is the question that has been bothering me for some time now - and to which I have given a great deal of thought. Should it be a mild sermon - one that will offend no one? Or should it be a courageous stand ona controversial issue? Should it be a general review of the individuals theology - or a specific probe into one aspect of that theology? Should it be a proclaimation or an admonition? Should it be a meek sermon or a bombastic one? I have had two months to reflect on my prdicament and I confess that I have not discovered a satisfactory solution.

I am aware that among the many motives and feelings accompanying you in worship this morning, there is a strong element of curiosity. You want to hear what the new man is like. You are aware, of course, of my very natural motives to be sharp this morning - and my hope that you will be here again next week. This subteranean dialogue between us only complicates things.

Hopefully, in and through it all, there is a desire on your part to begin to know me and my mind. Hopefully one of the reasons you came this morning was to discover how I feel about the church: what I feel its role ought to be: how I see the task of the layman in 1966. I am assuming this about you - and so I have set out only to begin - to briefly and generally lay a foundation for what I pray will be an effective and faithful ministry together with you.

Not long ago I happened upon a television program, on which a minister was being interviewed. The Rev. Bem Richardson was his name and I learned that he had recently quit the parish ministry and divorced himself from the institutional church.

5-24-64

Eternal God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we come before Thee - in prayer, individually, and yet bound together by thy spirit. We rejoice O Lord in thy promise, that wherever two or three are gathered in thy name, there art in the midst of them. We gather, in thy name, our Father, - make thy presence known to us; speak to us through thy word. Send thy Holy Spirit upon us, that we may be drawn nearer to thee and to each other.

O thou who art the creator of the world and all that is therein; we are truly grateful for all that hast given unto us. We thank thee for the life giving rest of the night just passed: for the splendor of nature - now showing forth their eternal creativity.

On this day our father we give thee special thanks for those who give their lives are involved in education, both teachers and pupils: We thank thee for schools, and colleges - for those who give their lives in the noble task of learning. We thank thee, our father, for all those who end their school years at this time - asking thy guidance and blessing upon them.

Our father we humbly pray for those less fortunate than we. -

We pray for those of our own number who are ill ÷ Be with Lois Phillips (Mrs. Meisel, Blythe, Bohnsack) - and her family: giving them a due sense of thy fatherly care.

O God, thou hast taught us to pray to thee in secret: - hear us now as we each one, silently, bring before thee the unspoken prayers of our hearts.

O God, we thank thee for the assurance that thou dost hear and answer our prayers - : hear us now as we pray, in Jesus name, the prayer he taught his disciples, saying - Our Father.

A MAN AND TWO SONS Luke 15: 11-32 July 17, 1966

The portion of scripture I have just read is traditionally known as the parable of the Prodigal Son. It is certainly one of the more familiar passages in the Bible. Its popularity is almost totally responsible for the fact that we even know the word prodigality at all - in fact I've never once heard it used in any other framework than a discussion of this particular story.

According to the dictionary, "Prodigality" is "extravagance in expenditure, excessive liberality, wastefullness". This is what we remember about the story - the son who was prodigal. He is the one for whom the story is named. At the outset however, I want to make what might sound like a radical proposal. I want to propose that the sin of prodigality is not the thrust of the parable at all. That in fact, it is an error - an error we have inherited from centuries of shallow reading at this point, to even call it the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

We know that Jesus employed parables to illustrate a specific point. Therefore we also know that the intent of the parable must be understood in relationship to the immediate circumstances in which Jesus told it. and that the parable can be seriously misunderstood, and actually become misleading when it is divorced from those circumstances.

And so let's clear the ledger of everything we know or have heard about the parable. And then let's take a good look at what Jesus said, when, why and to whom he said it.

7/17/66

Almighty and Eternal God, thou in whom we live and move and have our being, we lift up our hearts unto thee in praise and adoration. We rejoice that in thine infinite mjesty thou art like a father to us, that thy love binds us to thee and to each other. We rejoice, our father, that thou hast made thyself known to us, that in Jesus Christ thou hast come to redeem us and call us to be thy people. We rejoice in the opportunity to serve thee in thy church, with the assurance that thou art present whenever we gather in thy name. So awaken us to thy presen this evening: in trhis hour of worship, speak thy word to us: grant us beleiving and obedient hearts and lead us to new life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

O thou, who art the sovereign Lord of all nations and all peoples, we come before thee in shanme and sorrow. Once again we found ourselves caught in the ambiguity of war: once again we are aware of the fractured oneness of thy children. We confess our involvement in the sin of man - that sin which makes peace impossible. We confess that we have not found peace - nor practiced good will, even with our neighbors. In humility, our father, we pray for all those involved in the conflict in Viet Nam. Give thy gifts of wisdom and responsibility to our President and his advisers: give courage to those who fight and die: give comfort to their loved ones. Heal the sickness of hatred which war prompts within us: give strength to men of good will who strive for peace and justice and liberty, through Jesus Christ, who was and is the eternal Pronoe of Peace.

O thou who lovest the world with an everlasting love, we pray for thy suffering children. Help us to learn responsibility: prod us to acknowledge that we are our brother's keeper. Guide us that in all things we might love and care for others, even as thou hast loved and cared for us, through Jesua Christ our Lord.

Our Father we are grateful to thee for thy goodness and mercy towards us. Send thy Holy Spirit among us that we might grow in faith: that we might experience newness of life springing forth in our midst. Enliven us with conviction and courage, that we might answer thee in unselfish service and sacrificial love. All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ * who reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God world without end. Amen

* AM who taught his disciples to pray saying -

What A MAN Can Believe
3. God Breaks I n September 4, 1966 Communiob
Exodus 3: 1-12
Acts 9:1-9

When was the last time you thought about God? What kind of thoughts were they? What images and forms did your thoughts take? Were your ~~thoughts~~ feelings comfortable or fearful; inquisitive or guilty? If you pursue these rather personal questions, briefly but honestky, I believe that it will become obvious that no one spends much time thinking about God - and that when we do give the matter some thought it is so remote, so thoroughly divorced from the matters which really concern us that we can't truly say our thoughts have any form or structure - or that that they' elicit very strong feelings of any type.

You see, the mere thought of God is one of the most implausible thougts our minds are capable of thinking: ~~and today it has become a thought which almost no one thinks -- or better said, a thought which almost no one takes seriously.~~ in my day. Today traditional concepts have been exploded

Of course it never has been easy, and today there are many barriers to thinking about God that are peculiar to our generation. There is the traditional conflict between science and religion. I don't mean the clash between the Bible and Anthropology, for that exists in only the most narrow minds, whether they belong to the fundamentalist or to the scientist to whom the sum of reality can be contained in an equation. I mean the all-pervading faith of modern man in science genrally: a faith nutured by fantastic accomplishments in outer space, in medical technology, in all areas of our common life. It is a faith we all have - and it leaves little room for God.

There is the growing feeling of self-suffiency peculiar to our age: a feeling that expresses itself best in the image of the rugged American individualist, a man who needs nothing and no one to help him fulfill his potential. There is the urgent materialsim of our age:a sub religion that shouts from every televiiion commercial, every bill board, every

a baby i n a humble stable. The God who broke into the chaotic life of first century Palestine, teaching, healing, loving, forgiving, dying. This is thw
This is the God the church holds out to a world that can no longer beleive.

If he is a consistant Godm he has not changed. That means his nature ixs still to be breaking into human life. It meanas that he comes into our world - our lives and calls us, unlikely people that we are, to do most unlikely things. That, I beleive, is a radical thought, one which very few are willing to take seriously. It forces us to discard old concepts -

It means, on the broad scale that God is in some way very deeply involved in Viet Nam. It means he breaks in - in the slums, Perhaps at the Gary Neighborhood House; it means he is real in the Steel Mill, the kitchen and class room. It means that he is very mush involved in the liberation of enslaved people, whether those people langusih behand the iron curtain - or in a Negroe Ghetto. That, of course, is a very alien thought. And yet I continue to wonder how it is possible to beleive in this Biblical God and not at least think it every time another step is take to liberate a captive people.

On a personal level it means that God is not a remote deity to be addressed once a week in the liturgical repeating of the Lord's Prayer - but a partner,a fellow participant in our life. Not the God out there - but the God here - the God aptly described by Malcolm Boyd as the one present in the traffic jam and the hurried morning schedule.

He is a God who still calls mento serve and act and do: not all men dramatically like Moses and the burning bush and Paul and the bright blinding light: but all men, mostly quietly to serve and love and sacrifice in small, inconspicuous ways.

I think a man can beleive that God does break in. I think I have learned this in six years as your pastor. When I look at myself - and it is objectively unlikely that I should be a minister and not something else: when I look at many of you - and it is equally unlikely that many of you

5/2/65

Almighty and Eternal God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ - on this beautiful morning we search for words to express our adoration of thee. As the good earth once again brings forth new life - our sense of thy providence is renewed. As the day lengthens and the sun and rain call forth renewal and regeneration we know again that thou art God - and that thy grace and wisdom are eternal. O God, give us words to praise thee: open our eyes and hearts to thy presence. through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Our Father, hear now our individual prayers of thanksgiving.

Let us pray silently

O Thou who art our creator - thou who hast given us all that we have we thank thee. ~~We thank thee for~~ Through J.C. our Lord.

Our Father, hear now our individual prayers of petition for others.

Let us pray silently.

O Thou, who in Jesus Christ didst demonstrate thy concern for every man, we pray for those less fortunate than we. Be with those victims of floods and tornadoes and earthquake in our land, - give them courage to rebuild in faith. Be with those throughout the world who live in hunger and poverty - be with those who serve them. Be with the men and women of our armed forces - give them the knowledge of thy presence.

O God of mercy be with those of our own number who are ill. - Stand beside those who grieve - the Friedrickson - and the Wrights. Comfort them with the love and healing grace of thy H.S. - through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Our Father, hear ~~us now as~~ now our individual prayers for Faith and understanding - and the courage to live out our convictions

Let us pray silently

O Thou who hast called forth the church to minister to the world, and hast laid the responsibility for that ministry on our shoulders, help us as we seek to serve thee. O God, help thou our unbelief - heal the doubt and hesitancy that thwart our intentions. Guide us and direct us - as we seek to do thy will - through J.C. our Lord.

Our Father, hear us now as we pray together - the prayer our Lord taught his disciples saying -